

Excerpt from:

Norris, George W. "One Branch Legislature for States Would Improve Results: Nebraska Senator Presents Advantages to Be Gained by Doing Away with Bi-Cameral Body—Contends That Long Delays and Corrupt Influences Would Be Removed." *New York Times*, January 28, 1923.

The experience of more than one hundred years has demonstrated that the two-branch Legislature, at least, so far as the various States are concerned, has been very unsatisfactory in its results. One of the fundamental requisites[requirements] that should always exist in any Legislature where universal suffrage prevails¹, is to enable the citizen to properly place responsibility, either for the success or the failure of legislation[laws] . . .

It is quite a common thing in a double-branch Legislature for one house to shift responsibility for failure upon the other house. Bills on practically all legislation are made by conference committees. A bill that has passed one branch and then been amended in another one must go to conference for adjustment of the differences between the two houses . . .

When a bill is in conference it is necessary that compromises be made in order to secure any legislation. It very often happens that the most important features of legislation are put into the bills while they are being thus considered. Members of Conference Committees are often compelled[pressured] to surrender on important items where no surrender would be even demanded if consideration of the legislation were in the open where a public record could be had of the proceedings. When the bill emerges from conference it is not then subject to amendment. It must be accepted or rejected as a whole. The conference is held in secret. There is no record vote on any proposition decided at the conference.

The public is excluded from the deliberations[debates] often passed when it is known by those who pass them that the bill is to be killed in the other House, and in like manner, bills coming from the other House are pigeonholed in the first one. Responsibility for failure is thus divided, enabling participants in the fraudulent procedure to conceal their own records and to cover up their own tracks. In a one-branch Legislature it would be impossible to thus obscure the record by parliamentary tactics and proceedings² that make it impossible for the ordinary citizen to properly judge the record of his Representative.

One of the evils of our Legislatures is that they are entirely too large. In theory a large Legislature is supposed to give a larger and more complete representation of the entire citizenship. In practice, however, it has been demonstrated that a large membership is detrimental[harmful] to real representation . . . Members must deny themselves the right in

¹ where most people have the right to vote

² to hide their votes by taking advantage of the rules and structure of the legislature

large bodies, on important matters of legislation, to even offer amendments. They must surrender to committees the right to determine procedure. The very size of the bodies sometimes makes it impossible for the necessary and proper deliberation and discussion that should always take place before legislation is enacted . . .

A State having the kind of Legislature I have outlined would be able to increase the salaries of its members. Under existing conditions it is a well-known fact that it is extremely difficult in many instances to secure good men in State Legislatures, because the ordinary individual cannot afford to leave his business and expend the time necessary to attend the sessions of the Legislature. The result is that we not only get a less desirable membership, but the good legislator, who is induced[motivated] to sacrifice himself, must give the greater portion of his time to his private business and never becomes really posted on the propositions that come before the Legislature.

Existing conditions afford inducements to the dishonest and corrupt, who avail[help] themselves of the opportunity to become candidates for the Legislature with & view of recouping themselves after election by their official conduct.³ There are, of course, many honest and able men who are members of the State Legislatures. Undoubtedly, a large majority of them could be thus designated; but it is oftentimes much easier to deceive the honest man than it is to buy the corrupt man. The ordinary farmer or business man who goes to the Legislature with the very best of intentions is often deceived by lobbyists⁴ and evil influences. He is in attendance upon the Legislature but a short time and devotes the balance of his time to his business or occupation, and it is a physical impossibility, whatever may be his desire, to properly qualify himself for the duties of his office. A member of the Legislature ought to be paid a sufficient salary so that he could devote his time to the duties of his office. This would not only attract better men for the position but it would enable good men to perform better service. . .

The plan I have outlined would not only result in better legislation, but it would save money for the taxpayer. If members of such a Legislature were paid a salary equal to the salary of other State officials whose entire time is required in the performance of the duties of their offices, there would still be in most cases, a large saving of money on the salary item alone. We would not only get better legislators, and not only have the benefit of their entire time, but we would do it all with a less cost than under present conditions. . .

³ by making money abusing their government power

⁴ professionals who work for companies, non-profits, and other interest groups to persuade lawmakers into supporting or opposing issues